

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6358

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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SUBJ: PORTUGUESE MEDIA AT ELECTION TIME

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SUMMARY: THE INHERENT STABILITY WITHIN ALL ELEMENTS OF THE
PORTUGUESE MEDIA -- GIVEN A WELL-ORGANIZED, ACTIVE PRO-COMMUNIST
PRESENCE WHICH WAS NOT WEEDED OUT ALTOGETHER AFTER THE NOVEMBER 25
COUP ATTEMPT -- IS GROWING MORE EVIDENT. THE COMMUNISTS WILL
HAVE NO OPPORTUNITY TO ESTABLISH THEIR GONCALVIST-PERIOD PRE-
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EMINENCE IN THE MEDIA BEFORE NEXT MONTH'S ELECTIONS. BUT THEY

WILL CONTINUE TO HARASS THEIR NON-COMMUNIST EDITORS IN THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA. THEY MAY, IN FACT, CONTINUE A TREND OF INSERTING MORE OF THEIR PROPAGANDA INTO NEWS REPORTS THAN WAS COMMON IN THE WEEKS IMMEDIATELY AFTER NOVEMBER 1975. END SUMMARY.

1. THE PERSISTENT PRO-COMMUNISTS:

AS WILL BE RECALLED (REFTELS), THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT MOVED FOLLOWING NOVEMBER 25 TO SUSPEND SUSPECTED PRO-COMMUNISTS FROM THE STATE RADIO AND TELEVISION NETWORKS, AND TO NAME NEW ADMINISTRATORS FOR MOST OF THE EIGHT STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS. (OUTRIGHT MASS DISMISSALS DID NOT OCCUR BECAUSE LABOR LAW REQUIRE PROHIBITIVE FINANCIAL SETTLEMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE EMPLOYEES.) THE RESULT OF THE SUSPENSIONS AND INTRODUCTION OF NEW MANAGERMENTS WAS AN IMMEDIATE NEAR-TOTAL HALT TO THE STRONGLY ANTI-REGIME, PRO-COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA COMMON TO MOST ELEMENTS OF THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA. BUT SUSPENSIONS DID NOT WEED OUT ALL OF THE COMMUNISTS AND OTHER FAR-LEFTISTS. THEY, A WELL-ORGANIZED AND DEDICATED MINORITY STILL ON THE JOB, HAVE CONSISTENTLY SOUGHT TO DISRUPT THE EXERCISE OF BALANCED JOURNALISM WHENEVER POSSIBLE. EDITORS WORKING AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF HIGH-LEVEL STAFFERS WHO ARE COMMUNISTS (OR STAFFS WITH A NOTABLE PROPORTION OF COMMUNISTS) SIMPLY CANNOT CONTROL MUCH MORE THAN THE FIRST PAGE OF EACH EDITION. THE FOLLOWING EVENTS ILLUSTRATE THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PROBLEM:

A. THE OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY, ANOP, ON MARCH 11 SUSPENDED THE TOP NEWS EDITOR AND HIS DEPUTY FROM THEIR DUTIES AND PROHIBITED THEIR ENTRY INTO THE ANOP OFFICES. NO REASON WAS GIVEN PUBLICLY, BUT ANOP ADMINISTRATORS TOLD EMBOFFS TWO WEEKS EARLIER THAT THE NEWS STAFF WAS RIDDLED WITH COMMUNISTS, AND THAT "IT IS GROWING INCREASINGLY IMPOSSIBLE TO WORK WITH THEM." THESE ARE ANOP'S FIRST STAFF-LEVEL SUSPENSIONS, SINCE ONLY THE TOP ADMINISTRATORS WERE FIRED IMMEDIATELY AFTER NOVEMBER 25. ANOP BEFORE THAT DATE WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A PROPAGANDA ORGAN OF THE PCP.

B. EDITORIAL STAFF SUSPENSIONS AT LISBON'S "O SEculo" NEWSPAPER, WHICH BEFORE NOVEMBER 25 FOLLOWED A STRONG FAR-LEFT LINE, FAILED TO MAKE THE PAPER RESPONSIVE TO ITS PRESENT GOP-APPOINTED ADMINISTRATION. WHILE THE ADMINISTRATION WAS CHOSEN, IN PART, FOR ITS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TIES WITH THE CENTER-RIGHT PPD, THE PAPER IN FACT EVIDENCES CHOICE AND HANDLING OF EDITORIAL MATERIALS BY MAOIST MRPP SUPPORTERS. INTERNAL INSTABILITY WAS ONE FACTOR LEADING TO MARCH 11 RESIGNATION OF THE "O SEculo" EDITOR WHO HAD BEEN NAMED IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING NOVEMBER 25 EVENTS. "VIDA MUNDIAL," A WEEKLY MAGAZINE BELONGING TO THE "O SEculo" PUBLISHING COMPANY, HAS FAILED TO REAPPEAR SINCE NOVEMBER 25; ITS NEW EDITOR, OUTSPOKEN WRITER-JOURNALIST NATALIA CORREIA, HAS MADE IT CLEAR THAT SINCE SHE CANNOT CONTROL

THE COMMUNIST-MAJORITY STAFF, THE PUBLICATION MAY STAY IN THE DEEP FREEZE INDEFINITELY.

C. THE EDITORS OF STATE-OWNED, LEADING CIRCULATION LISBON MORNING DAILY "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" OFFERED THEIR RESIGNATIONS FEBRUARY 27 TO GOP AFTER EDITORIAL WORKERS, ABOUT HALF OF WHOM ARE COMMUNISTS, HELD A PUBLICIZED MEETING WITHOUT REQUIRED EDITORS' PERMISSION. RESIGNATIONS WERE NOT ACCEPTED. PAPER IS OF INCREASINGLY MEDIOCRE QUALITY BECAUSE COMMUNISTS ON STAFF OBSTRUCT EDITORS AT EVERY TURN. EDITORS CONCEDE TO US PRIVATELY THAT THEY ARE CONDUCTING A "HOLDING ACTION."

D. THE MINISTRY OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS ON MARCH 3 BOWED TO PRESURES AND SAID IT WOULD PERMIT THE 108 STATE TV AND RADIO NETWORKS' EMPLOYEES WHO WERE SUSPENDED AFTER NOVEMBER 25 TO RETURN TO WORK. TO DATE, HOWEVER, FEW OF THESE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEWS AREA HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO RESUME THEIR JOBS. NONETHELESS, THERE IS EVIDENCE THAT SOME "COMRADES" OF THEIRS REMAINED ON HAND ALL ALONG; AS HAS BEEN THE CUSTOM DURING TIMES OF REAL OR IMAGINED POLITICAL UNSETTLEMENT (I.E., ELECTIONS, AT PRESENT), THESE RADIO NETWORK EMPLOYEES ARE PLAYING LEFTIST "REVOLUTIONARY" SONGS MORE FREQUENTLY IN RECENT DAYS--EVIDENTLY TO UPLIFT KINDRED SPIRITS. THE TELEVISION NETWORK RECENTLY HAS CARRIED SUCH OUTRIGHT PROPAGANDISTIC COMMUNIST PROGRAMS (SOME SOVIET, SOME CUBAN) THAT THE SOCIALIST PARTY TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF COMPLAINING ABOUT FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN TV PROGRAMMING.

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E. A PLAN FOR REORGANIZING THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA ADVANCED BY MASS COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER ALMEIDA SANTOS (SEE REFTTEL A) HAS BEEN SO BEATEN DOWN BY OPPONENTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE MEDIA, THAT THE PROGRAM HAS LITTLE CHANCE OF EVEN PARTIAL ADOPTION BEFORE ELECTIONS. THE IRE AND DETERMINATION OF THE LEFTIST OPPONENTS OF THIS PLAN WERE EVIDENT IN MARCH 10 PUBLICATION OF YET ANOTHER DOCUMENT REPUDIATING THE ALMEIDA SANTOS PLAN, PUBLISHED BY AN AD HOC GROUP OF "WORKERS IN THE MEDIA FIELD."

F. FERMENT CONTINUES IN OTHER STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS. THE NEWS EDITOR OF AFTERNOON "DIARIO DE LISBOA," HIMSELF A NON-COMMUNIST LEFTIST, SAYS HE HAS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO PUBLISH A "BALANCED" NEWSPAPER BECAUSE HALF OF HIS EDITORIAL STAFF MEMBERS ARE "CARD-CARRYING" COMMUNISTS. ONE OF THE THREE ADMINIS-

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TRATORS OF AFTERNOON " A CAPITALZ TOLD EMBOFFS THAT A NEW EDITOR WAS NAMED LAST MONTH TO TIGHTEN CONTROLS AGAINST COMMUNIST EDITORIAL STAFFERS (THREE STRONG ONES, ESPECIALLY) AND TO MOVE THE PAPER'S POLITICAL LINE FROM CENTER-LEFT TO CENTER.

G. HARD-LINE COMMUNISTS OUSTED FROM STATE-OWNED NEWSPAPERS AND ANOP AFTER NOVEMBER 25 NOW EDIT THE DAILY "O DIARIO." OTHERS OF THEM ARE PREPARING TO START YET ANOTHER DAILY SHORTLY WHICH WILL BE CALLED "PAGINA UM."

H. THE COMMUNISTS CONTINUE TO CONTROL ELECTIONS IN THE JOURNALISTS UNION, WITH FEWER THAN A FOURTH OF THE TOTAL MEMBERSHIP USUALLY VOTING.

2. NET EFFECT ON PUBLIC:
NEWSSTANDS ARE FILLED WITH A VARIETY OF PAPERS, MANY OF THEM FAIRLY BLAND (ESPECIALLY THE STATE-OWNED ONES). THE INDEPENDENT, CENTER-ORIENTED PRESS CONTINUES TO FIND A RECEPTIVE PUBLIC. COMMUNIST "O DIARIO" HAS PROVED UNAPPEALING EXCEPT TO PCP FOLLOWERS. NEW WEEKLIES ARE APPEARING CONSTANTLY, WITH THE LATEST BEING "O SOL," A CENTER-

RIGHT "FIGHTING PAPER" EDITED BY CONTROVERSIAL VERA LAGOA (WHOSE WEEKLY "O DIABO" WAS PROHIBITED FROM PUBLISHING AFTER TWO ISSUES BECAUSE THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL THOUGHT IT HAD DEFAMED THE PRESIDENT, CONTRARY TO THE PRESS LAW.) FROM AN ECONOMIC POINT OF VIEW, THERE ARE TOO MANY NEWSPAPERS. BUT FROM THE READERS' VIEWPOINT, THERE IS A FULL RANGE OF PAPERS IN WHICH ALL PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL STANDS ARE FULLY PRESENTED.

3. COMMENT: THE EXISTING UNSTABLE SITUATION PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE THROUGH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS -- PERHAPS EVEN LONGER, UNTIL THERE IS A GOVERNMENT WITH RENEWED MOMENTUM TO CONSOLIDATE THE DEFICIT-RUNNING STATE-OWNED PRESS. THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO SEE EXCESS RESOURCES -- PERSONNEL AND PRINTING EQUIPMENT -- DECENTRALIZED INTO CREATION OF SEVERAL NEW REGIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS OUTSIDE OF LISBON. BUT FEW JOURNALISTS ARE LIKELY TO BE WILLING TO MOVE, SO THAT SCHEME SEEMS IMPRACTICAL. BASIC PROBLEM IS THAT NEEDED CONSOLIDATION OF MEDIA WILL PUT JOURNALISTS OUT OF WORK
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IN ECONOMY ALREADY RUNNING 14 PERCENT UNEMPLOYED. THE OTHER BASIC PROBLEM IS THAT THE PRO-COMMUNIST JOURNALISTS ARE, AS IN OTHER SECTORS, WELL ORGANIZED AND THE ONES WITH THE LONGEST STAYING POWER. THE OUTLOOK IS FOR MORE STRIFE WITHIN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY, AND SOME CONTINUED COMMUNIST INROADS INTO BALANCED REPORTING.
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